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Medellin, Colombia (Pixabay/Julian Zapata)



by Daylenis Lara Rodríguez

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On my journey as a disciple and follower of Jesus, I've been blessed to be surrounded by life itself — to share in spaces of closeness, welcome, transformation and resilience. One of those places is the Institución Técnica San José Obrero, or ITSJO, a project of the Sisters Servants of St. Joseph in Medellín, Colombia.

Located in the El Playón neighborhood, Comuna 3, ITSJO is rooted in a humble, working-class community marked by a history of violence and poverty. True to its name, the institution provides education geared toward the workforce through various technical programs. It offers young people and adults not only job training but also holistic growth — a human formation that frees, supports, trusts and hopes.

For many of the young men and women who come here, drugs, street life, prostitution and gangs are harsh realities. Many arrive expecting only academic training but leave grateful not just for quality education, but also for the listening, support and life-changing help they receive — things that extend far beyond the classroom.

For me, it's been a beautiful experience to work alongside a dedicated team, made up of sisters and committed laypeople who embody the Josefino charism. Although I'm not directly involved in the project, I try to contribute in whatever small ways I can.

Sr. Deisy Camargo Echeverría has been part of this work for several years. She shared with me that, as a Sister Servant of St. Joseph, her experience at ITSJO has been deeply meaningful. For her, the Workshop of Mother Bonifacia — our foundress — takes on a new life here, serving as a place of welcome, growth, accompaniment and preparation for work and human development. Men, women and young people arrive with a profound desire for opportunity, to pursue dreams and achieve goals.

She believes that both the students and the staff experience ITSJO as a truly charism-driven community. From the moment students first seek admission and throughout their time at the institution, the focus is on transforming lives through quality training. The goal is to promote and restore dignity to these vulnerable individuals, nurturing them to be compassionate, resilient and committed both to themselves and to a more inclusive, equitable and caring society.

Luz Marina Monsalve, a social worker on the ITSJO team, says this work gives her life meaning and deep satisfaction. "Love of God and neighbor is my mission," she told me. "It's about reaching out to young people, helping them overcome depression

and sadness." She believes work dignifies people, and that's exactly what ITSJO offers: knowledge, technical training, financial support, education and job placement.

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In addition to its technical programs, ITSJO hosts the Emprendamos Project, which seeks to create dignified work opportunities for people in the community and surrounding areas. Its core mission is to empower entrepreneurs to build sustainable businesses. Ana Beatriz Ramírez, a social worker and current project coordinator, explained that their focus is always on the person. "We want them to stand on their own, to learn, to be happy and to enjoy what they do."

For Ana Beatriz, their work rests on four pillars: being, doing, knowing and having — with being at the center. She told me they work with both men and women, but especially with women, honoring the unique process and time each person needs. New participants join regularly, but there is ongoing support throughout. The project centers on creating self-employment and strengthening entrepreneurs, especially those in vulnerable situations.

I've been privileged to take part in and support some of the gatherings for women entrepreneurs. It's inspiring to witness their growth and progress, to hear them speak about the project and how they've brought their businesses to life.

The human warmth and quality at ITSJO shine through. The staff feels like family. The Spirit's movement — powerful and stirring — is evident whenever these men and women go beyond what's expected. They care for one another, lift each other up, embrace and hold steady. What might be an ordinary place of study transforms into a space of joy and hope — a true commitment to the individual and their life.

For me, this is a call to commit to others and to go beyond what's required of me. It invites me to see the person before me with all their richness and potential. The team at Institución Técnica San José Obrero is living this call every day, reaching out, breaking down walls of indifference, listening, welcoming and encouraging. In small and everyday ways, we hold onto hope and stand for life.